

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

CONTACT: Israel Klein

Thursday, December 4, 2003, 4:00 p.m. EST

Jeff Duncan

202-225-2836

MARKEY CALLS FOR POTASSIUM IODIDE STOCKPILING AND DISTRIBUTION TO PROTECT AGAINST NUCLEAR TERRORISM

National Academy of Sciences Report Calls on States, Feds to Take Actions to Protect Populations

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Democratic Member of the House Energy and Commerce and Homeland Security Committees, and the author of legislation authorizing funding for a program to stockpile and distribute potassium iodide to families living near nuclear power plants, today welcomed the release of a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report recommending making potassium iodide available to everyone at risk of significant radiological health consequences in the event of a terrorist attack on or catastrophic accident at a nuclear power plant. The NAS report was mandated under the Markey amendment, which was as part of comprehensive bio-terrorism legislation enacted by Congress in 2002.

“The National Academy of Sciences has confirmed a conclusion reached by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) 25 years ago -- that potassium iodine is a safe and effective means of protecting the public from the radioactive iodine that would be released into the atmosphere if terrorists ever launched a successful attack against, or if an accident caused a full-scale core meltdown and containment breach at a nuclear power plant,” said Rep. Markey, who has fought for more than twenty years for government action to make the substance available to those living around nuclear plants.

Despite a recommendation for potassium iodide distribution made by a government panel following the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979, the nuclear utilities industry long resisted potassium iodide distribution. The nuclear industry argued that doing so would only raise public concerns about the safety of nuclear power. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, and evidence that terrorists may be targeting nuclear power plants in the U.S., Congress adopted the Markey legislation authorizing the federal government to make available to state and local governments potassium iodide tablets in sufficient quantities to protect the populations living within 20 miles of each of the nation's 103 currently operating nuclear power plants.

Rep. Markey continued, “In the post-September 11th environment, our nation can no longer afford to pretend that a nuclear meltdown cannot happen here. We know that Al Qaeda terrorists have put nuclear power plants at the very top of their target list. The question is what are we going to do to protect the public if they should ever succeed? What the National Academy of Sciences has recommended is that everyone at risk of significant health consequences in such an accident – particularly infants, children, and pregnant women or women who are breast-feeding – should be able to get quick access to potassium iodide in order to prevent thyroid cancers and other thyroid disorders.”

"I think it is time for the twelve states that have nuclear power plants within their borders but still don't distribute potassium iodide to their citizens to change course immediately. In addition, the four states that currently plan on only distributing potassium iodide after a nuclear accident or a terrorist attack need to consider adopting a policy of pre-distribution. It is simply irresponsible for these states to drag their feet in taking prudent and relatively inexpensive steps to protect the public in the event of an act of nuclear terrorism," Rep. Markey said.

According to the NAS Report, the 12 nuclear power plant states which do not currently have potassium iodide distribution programs for their general populations are: Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. In some of these states, potassium iodide is available only for emergency workers, or for institutionalized populations, such as those in prisons or in nursing homes and hospitals.

In contrast, the NAS found that 17 states with nuclear power plants either within or near their borders currently have programs in place for pre-distribution of potassium iodide to the general population (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia). Four other states with nuclear power plants within their borders do not pre-distribute potassium iodide, but do stockpile the substance for post-nuclear incident distribution (Alabama, Arizona, Florida, and Mississippi).

Rep. Markey concluded, "This report provides an excellent overview for all state and local governments that are involved in nuclear power plant emergency planning. Many states and localities need to upgrade their emergency planning to address the risk that someday terrorists might target a nuclear power plant in America for attack. And I believe that every state that could experience a nuclear accident or nuclear terrorist attack must stockpile and distribute potassium iodide."

Copies of the NAS report can be obtained from the National Academy of Sciences at www.nap.edu.

#